UNITED NATIONS

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General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/956
S/1998/527
17 June 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-second session
Agenda item 61
QUESTION OF CYPRUS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-third year

Letter dated 17 June 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 15 June 1998 addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Volkan VURAL
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Letter dated 15 June 1998 from Mr. Aytuğ Plümer addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 3 June 1998 addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative at the United Nations (A/52/930-S/1998/460), which contains allegations regarding cultural property in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Repeated allegations regarding the so-called "destruction of the religious and cultural identity" of Northern Cyprus have been amply dealt with in our previous communications addressed to you, most recently in my letter dated 9 April 1998 (A/52/872-S/1998/327, annex). Suffice it to say that it has been the Greek Cypriot side that has systematically tried to eradicate the Turkish-Muslim heritage of Cyprus, in particular during the "ethnic cleansing" campaign directed against the Turkish Cypriot people between 1963 and 1974 when mosques, shrines and other places of Muslim worship in 103 villages across the island were destroyed (a list of mosques and Muslim shrines destroyed or damaged up until 20 July 1974 has been circulated in the appendix to document A/52/366-S/1997/724 of 16 September 1997).

Today, the Greek Cypriot administration is still perpetuating a policy of religious intolerance towards the Islamic heritage in South Cyprus, where Ottoman Turkish architecture is under threat of disintegration as a result of total neglect. A case in point is the rejection by the Greek Cypriot administration of a proposal made by an undisclosed foreign national (of Muslim faith) residing in Paphos, South Cyprus, for the repair and conservation of the mosque in the Mutallo quarter of Paphos. According to the Greek Cypriot press of 23, 24 and 27 May 1998, this proposal has been strongly opposed by the Paphos municipality, the Orthodox church and residents of Paphos in general, who do not wish to see the mosque restored and opened for worship. This case alone demonstrates the hypocritical nature of the remarks made by the Greek Cypriot representative that the policy of his administration "is to protect and maintain all cultural, historical and religious monuments in Cyprus".

While failing to protect and maintain the Turkish-Muslim heritage in South Cyprus, at the same time, the Greek Cypriot side is doing its utmost to hamper the efforts of the authorities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to secure financial and technical assistance from international organizations that would contribute towards the preservation of the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus.

Our authorities take pride in their continuous efforts to protect the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus, utilizing limited resources in the most efficient manner in maintaining and restoring all sites and monuments irrespective of their historical and religious origins. In addition, our authorities have also effectively employed a universally accepted method of preservation by putting historical sites into everyday use wherever applicable.

The Greek Cypriot allegations concerning the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus are baseless and politically motivated. These false accusations are part of the ongoing campaign of propaganda aimed at perpetuating the myth that the Greek Cypriot side is the sole sovereign authority on the island. The Greek Cypriot administration should be strongly urged by the international community to cease forthwith such futile propaganda efforts and instead concentrate on making a positive contribution towards reconciliation by acknowledging the existing realities on the island.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Aytuğ PLÜMER
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus